

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, GY
SUBJECT: TUC PRESIDENT BLAIR LOOKS AT INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS IN 1978

BEGIN SUMMARY: BASIL BLAIR, PRESIDENT OF THE TRADES UNION CONGRESS (TUC), HAS STARTED OFF THE NEW YEAR WITH AN EXHORTATION TO GUYANESE WORKERS TO HELP THEIR COUNTRY THROUGH THE PRESENT ECONOMIC CRISIS BY CONCENTRATING ON ACHIEVING GREATER PRODUCTION. IN DOING SO, BLAIR WAS APPARENTLY RESPONDING TO PRIME MINISTER BURNHAM'S NEW YEAR MESSAGE CALLING UPON WORKERS TO PRODUCE MORE IN RETURN FOR THE GOG'S "ACT OF FAITH" MANIFESTED IN THE INCREASE IN THE MINIMUM WAGE. DESPITE THE COOPERATION OF TUC LEADERS WITH THE GOG, THE STRAINS IN GOVERNMENT-LABOR RELATIONS PROBABLY WILL INCREASE AS THE GOG MOVES TO CARRY OUT RETRENCHMENT AND REDEPLOYMENT PLANS AND IMPLEMENT OTHER SEVERE AUSTERITY MEASURES. END SUMMARY.

1. IN AN INTERVIEW PUBLISHED BY THE GUYANA CHRONICLE ON JANUARY 4, TUC PRESIDENT BLAIR SAID THAT GUYANA COULD PULL THROUGH THE ECONOMIC CRISIS IF ALL
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GUYANESE CONCENTRATE ON PRODUCTION. IN BLAIR'S VIEW "THE WORKERS,...CAN LICK THIS INFLATION AND AUSTERITY." BLAIR REMARKED THAT ONE FACTOR IN THE ECONOMY'S FAVOR WAS THE CLOSE RELATIONSHIP THAT EXISTED BETWEEN THE TUC AND THE GOVERNMENT. HE SAID THAT THE TRADES UNION MOVEMENT HAD ALWAYS BEEN CONSULTED ON ANY POLICY DECISIONS THAT WOULD HAVE AN EFFECT ON IT BUT DESPITE THESE CON-

SULTATIONS, SOME VOICES WERE RAISED URGING THE TUC TO TAKE POLITICAL DECISIONS THAT WOULD USURP THE ELECTED GOVERNMENT. AS LONG AS THE CONSULTATIONS CONTINUE THERE COULD BE NO JUSTIFICATION FOR THIS RECOMMENDED USURPATION.

2. THE TUC PRESIDENT STATED THAT HE WOULD BE THE MAIN REPRESENTATIVE AT THE CONFERENCE ON REDEPLOYMENT WHICH IS SCHEDULED TO BE HELD JANUARY 7-8 AT THE SOPHIA CENTER. THE TUC HAD SUBMITTED A MEMORANDUM TO THE MINISTER OF LABOR ON THE SUBJECT OF REDEPLOYMENT BUT BLAIR SAID HE COULD NOT MAKE IT PUBLIC.

3. COMMENT: BLAIR IS PROBABLY AS CLOSE TO THE GOG AS ANY ELECTED TUC PRESIDENT COULD BE. HIS STATEMENT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN AN ATTEMPT TO RESPOND POSITIVELY TO PRIME MINISTER BURNHAM'S REPEATED CALLS FOR INCREASED PRODUCTION, AND SPECIFICALLY TO THE PM'S JANUARY 1 ASSERTION THAT THE INCREASE IN THE MINIMUM WAGE TO G\$11.00 PER DAY WAS AN "ACT OF FAITH" BY THE GOG AND THAT WORKERS SHOULD RESPOND WITH GREATER PRODUCTION. DESPITE GOOD INTENTIONS BY LABOR AND GOVERNMENT LEADERS, WE ANTICIPATE THAT THAT GOG WILL HAVE INCREASING TROUBLE WITH LABOR IN THE MONTHS AHEAD. THE GOG'S RETRENCHMENT AND REDEPLOYMENT OF WORKERS IS ALREADY UNDERWAY AND REPORTEDLY THE GOG IS PLANNING--DUE TO IMF INSISTENCE-- TO REMOVE SUBSIDIES FROM BASIC FOOD ITEMS, SHARPLY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INCREASE TAXES ON ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES, AND INCREASE WATER AND ELECTRICITY RATES. ALL OF THESE MEASURES WILL ADD TO THE ALREADY CONSIDERABLE WORKER DISCONTENT. ALSO THE RANK AND FILE IN UNIONS ARE REPORTEDLY FEARFUL THAT THE GOG DOES NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT FUNDS TO MEET THE PAY INCREASES. THUS THE GOG AND COOPERATIVE LABOR LEADERS SUCH AS BLAIR WILL HAVE DIFFICULTY PREVENTING FURTHER DETERIORATION OF WORKER-GOVERNMENT RELATIONS. BLACKEN

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